

Comeback *Victory*

A gymnast's injury threatens to derail her MISS TEEN AMERICA 2006 chances, until her new talent routine saves the day



STYLE AND SUBSTANCE: Miss Teen America 2006 Brittany Monico poses for an official portrait — one of 5,000 photos she's to appear in. Her ultimate purpose was due as much to her fitness in Belmont and her brave final Talent performance after injuring her hand during preliminaries.

—CHRIS MUMFORD



Déjà vu (da zhä voo) n. 1. Psychology. The illusion of having already experienced something actually being experienced for the first time. The date was July 8, 2006, but in the mind's eye of Brittany Monico, it could have been September 14, 2003. As she stood in the spotlight holding hands with the lovely Ilsa Levine, Miss Texas Teen America, she glanced up and saw Meghan Whitney Bryan, the then-reigning Miss Teen America, waiting to see which of the two girls would receive the national crown that she was holding.

Brittany's mind flashed back three years earlier when she had been crowned Miss Jr. Teen America by none other than Meghan Bryan. Brittany held her breath until the announcement came for the first alternate, and then the full impact of the moment hit her. She had done it. She had returned and Meghan had crowned her once again. It was definitely a déjà vu moment. This was the big crown, the one that she had been eyeing since she was 12 years old and entered her first Teen America state pageant. Now, at 16, she was a seasoned pro.

Winning wasn't as easy as it seemed. The 44 young women were the most accomplished group of girls that this pageant system has seen. The point spread at the top was in the single digits.

The field had arrived on a Saturday and spent a part of every day making appearances in Nashville. The remainder of the days and evenings were spent in rehearsals. By the end of the week, fatigue was setting in, but the delegates rallied for the two preliminary shows. By Saturday, the preliminary judges had rendered their decision for the Top 10: Lindsay Hanson (OH), Hope Wiseman (Chesapeake), Sarah Dale Simpkins (MS), Brittany Monico (RI), Katie Meadowcroft (DE), Chrissy Caporuscio (CT), Ilsa Levine (TX), Alexis Wagner (AZ), Courtney Cheatham (NV), and Sarah DeBruhl (Palmetto State).

The semifinalists competed again in Swimsuit, Evening Wear, Talent and On-



STEPPING UP: After Brittany and the entire field of contestants demonstrate their up-tempo energy in a production number (left), the tension rises as the Top 5 of Miss Teen America await the judges' decision. They are (below left, l-r) 4th Alt. Sarah Dale Simpkins, Miss Teen America '06 Brittany Monico, 3rd Alt. Lindsay Hanson, 2nd Alt. Alexis Wagner, and 1st Alt. Ilsa Levine.



stage Interview before the final five were announced. With one more question to go before the scepter was passed, the tension in the Bell-South Acuff Theatre mounted. Each girl answered the same question, giving the judges the opportunity to see how well each contestant could think on her feet. After deliberating, the judges had delivered a cohesive conclusion. Fourth Alternate went to Mississippi, Third Alternate to Ohio, and Second Alternate to Arizona. The top two spots belonged to Texas and Rhode Island — appropriately, since they had become inseparable during the course of the week, with each wanting victory for her new friend as much as she wanted it for herself. When the First Al-

ternate position was announced, no one was happier for Brittany than Ilsa Levine.

It hadn't been all smooth sailing for Brittany, however. During rehearsal on the day of the final preliminary competition, Brittany injured her hand at the base of her thumb while tumbling. Undaunted, she made the decision to perform her routine unaltered that evening, which was successful, and she was all smiles — or so it seemed. At the end of competition that evening, Brittany was taken to Vanderbilt Children's Hospital, where x-rays showed she had fractured her hand.

The following evening was the final competition, and Brittany had to decide whether to play it safe and withdraw from

the competition or attempt to rework her routine with only a few hours left before the show began. She opted to go for it. She converted many of her walkover maneuvers to one-handed stunts — not easy because it meant she was going to be supporting her weight on her non-dominant hand — and threw in some aerials to replace other stunts. After her impressive performance, the finals judges awarded her the first-place spot in the Talent competition.

The Talent win for the week, however, belonged to Sarah DeBruhl, who also performed a superior gymnastics routine peppered with an array of difficult strength moves. The nonfinalist Talent award went to Shirley Zheng of District of Columbia for her elegant performance on piano. Sarah Dale Simpkins took home the Interview award as well as the Miss Congeniality title, Swimsuit went to Arizona Teen Alexis Wagner, while Lindsay Hanson took home the Evening Wear award.

The mood at the send-off breakfast was a mixture of glee and gloom, as the young woman prepared to say good-bye to the new friends that they knew they would not see for a while. For Brittany Monico, the garden of dreams that she had been carefully cultivating is just beginning to blossom. She would emcee the Jr. Teen America Pageant a few weeks later and help usher in the new Ms. America next spring. She has already had more than 5,000 photos taken of her in the first three weeks of her reign, and will spend the year traveling throughout the country promoting her platform, "HOPE," and speaking to school children on the importance of community involvement. □

Top 5

Miss Teen America 2006	Brittany Monico (RI)
1st Alternate	Ilsa Levine (TX)
2nd Alternate	Alexis Wagner (AZ)
3rd Alternate	Lindsay Hanson (OH)
4th Alternate	Sarah Dale Simpkins (MS)